

How HR Can Help Workers with Disabilities

Most people with disabilities say supportive co-workers and supervisors make all the difference. Here are eight reminders about employment of employees with disabilities.

- ✓ **Provide a comfortable environment** in which an open discussion of issues is welcomed.
- ✓ **Describe what the interview process involves**, i.e., any tests or job demonstrations, so that the interviewee can be prepared. Fifty-five percent of individuals interviewed cited a company's culture and work environment as a critical factor in their employment success.
- ✓ **Increase employer knowledge about assistive technology** and what it can do for an employee with special needs.
- ✓ **Provide IT staff with training on AT so that they can be prepared** to address any compatibility problems between the company's systems and an employee's technology. Fifty-five percent of individuals interviewed believed that AT availability and use was fundamental to their employability.
- ✓ **Provide more opportunities such as summer jobs and internships for individuals with disabilities**, since these experiences will introduce people with disabilities to the world of work. Such an experience can alleviate some of the hardships of the job search by providing valuable interviewing and work skills. Nearly 33 percent of those interviewed wished there were more internship and training opportunities available to people with disabilities.
- ✓ **Consider flextime and time-sharing options.** The option of a flexible work schedule was the third most common accommodation made for the group of individuals interviewed.
- ✓ **Provide more diversity training to HR professionals** and other staff responsible for conducting interviews. Forty percent

of participants felt that there is still a need for more training and education about disabilities for employers.

- ✓ **Provide more training to all employees about disabilities.** Fifty-five percent of the individuals interviewed cited supportive and open-minded coworkers and supervisors as one of the critical factors in their employment success.

**Source: Workforce, August 2002, p. 44*

Telecommuting: a Flexible Work Option

Current trends indicate that employers are promoting more workplace flexibility for their employees and tailoring the jobs to individuals. The image of the workplace as 'somewhere to go to work' is fading and being replaced with employees working where they can be most efficient and productive.

Telecommuting, also known as *teleworking*, is opening up new opportunities for persons with disabilities. It provides alternative work arrangements that some employees may need to help them maintain their health and work productively. More importantly, telecommuting removes the transportation barriers that working at traditional workplace settings present. Through the use of telecommuting, many businesses are able to eliminate difficult transportation and scheduling needs that some employees with disabilities may have, yet still keep them on the job. A well designed telecommuting program can offer businesses opportunities to:

- ◆ Retain valued employee talent
- ◆ Save money while increasing productivity
- ◆ Reduce employee turnover and recruitment costs
- ◆ Control the rising cost of disability benefits
- ◆ Comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)